

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL SYDNEY

TO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5906

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SYDNEY 2434

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AS

SUBJ: FORTHCOMING ELECTION OF NEW PREMIER IN NEW SOUTH WALES

1. LIBERAL PARTY CAUCUS IN N.S.W. WILL MEET WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20, TO ELECT A NEW LEADER WHO WILL BECOME PREMIER, SUCCEEDING SIR ROBERT ASKIN WHO HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED HIS RETIREMENT WHICH WILL PROBABLY TAKE PLACE ABOUT NEW YEAR'S DAY. THE THREE CANDIDATES ARE: (A) MINISTER OF EDUCATION ERIC WILLIS, (B) MINISTER OF LANDS AND TOURISM TOM LEWIS, (C) MINISTER OF JUSTICE, ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN MADDISON.

2. WHILE WILLIS HAS HAD THE INSIDE TRACK AND HAS BEEN FAVORED TO WIN FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, THE ODDS IN THE LAST FEW WEEKS HAVE NARROWED WITH LEWIS PRESENTING A VERY STRONG CHALLENGE. BASED ON CONVERSATIONS WITH LIBERAL MEMBERS BARRACLOUGH AND MASON, AND LABOR OPPOSITION LEADER NEVILLE WRAN, THERE IS STILL TODAY A VERY SLIGHT EDGE ON WILLIS BUT NO ONE IS PREPARED TO PREDICT CONCLUSIVELY. ACCORDING TO WRAN, THE ONLY QUESTION AT ISSUE BETWEEN WILLIS AND LEWIS IS HOW TWO MEMBERS EXPECTED TO VOTE FOR MADDISON WILL DISTRIBUTE THEIR SECOND PREFERENCE VOTES, THAT IS WHETHER TO WILLIS OR LEWIS.

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EM IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER EITHER WILLIS OR LEWIS WILL BE ABLE TO MATCH HAMER'S SUCCESS IN TAKING OVER FROM HENRY BOLTE IN VICTORIA AND AT THE SAME TIME CONSOLIDATING HIS OWN POSITION AND THAT OF HIS PARTY. THE LIBERAL/COUNTRY PARTY COALITION IN N.S.W. IS NOT REPEAT NOT A HIGHLY DYNAMIC, INSPIRING ORGANIZATION. UNDER SIR ROBERT ASKIN AS PREMIER OVER THE PAST EIGHT YEARS, THE COALITION HAS TURNED IN A WORK-MANLIKE PERFORMANCE, RELYING HEAVILY ON ASKIN'S ACKNOWLEDGED SKILL AT CAMPAIGNING. IN THE PAST YEAR, HOWEVER, ASKIN'S AURA HAS DIMMED UNDER SEVERAL UNSAVORY POLITICAL EVENTS AND THE COALITION IS IN NEED OF REJUVENATION. NEXT ELECTION IS DUE IN NOVEMBER 1976 BUT ACTUAL TIMING WILL, OF COURSE, DEPEND ON HOW THE NEW PREMIER VIEWS HIS PROSPECTS. THE LABOR PARTY'S IMAGE AND PROSPECTS HAVE IMPROVED SOMEWHAT AS A RESULT OF THE PERFORMANCE OF THE YOUNG AND APPEALING NEW OPPOSITION LEADER NEVILLE WRAN, WHO REPLACED THE SOMEWHAT TIRED PAT HILLS LAST YEAR.

4. BETWEEN WILLIS AND LEWIS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT WILLIS IS PROBABLY THE MORE EFFECTIVE MANAGER AND ADMINISTRATOR WHILE LEWIS IS PROBABLY MORE EFFECTIVE IN PERSONAL RELATIONS AND ELECTORAL ACTIVITY. LEADING LABOR PARTY OFFICIALS IN SYDNEY CONCUR WITH THIS ESTIMATE AND SEVERAL HAVE SAID THAT FROM LABOR'S POINT OF VIEW, THE BEST WINNER WOULD BE WILLIS WHO IS GOOD TO WORK WITH BUT HAS LITTLE POLITICAL APPEAL, AND THE WORST WINNER FOR LABOR WOULD BE MADDISON WHO WOULD BE BEST ABLE TO ADOPT A SMALL "L" IMAGE AND THEREFORE WOULD BE THE GREATEST THREAT TO LABOR IN THE NEXT ELECTION.
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